

Autism Accreditation Assessment

Vanguard School

Reference No.	29740
Assessment dates	16-18 th November 2021
Lead Assessor	Lana Holmes
External Moderator	Jean Mockford
Status prior to the assessment	Working towards
Advanced status applied for	no

Section 1: Context

About the Provision

Brief description of the provision made for autistic people:

Vanguard School is a specialist secondary school for autistic students.

Number of autistic people supported by the provision:

This is an autism specific school, there are 41 pupils currently on roll at Vanguard School.

Range of autistic people supported by the provision:

The school caters for students from year 7 (age 12-12) all the way to six form (Age 16-17).

Outcome of last statutory assessment (Body; date, outcome):

The school opened in January 2020 and are awaiting their first OFSTED inspection.

Vanguard received a positive report from the Department of Education

About the Assessment

- The assessment took place over 3 days.
- The provision's adviser acted as assessor with support from a moderator.
- A presentation was given on how provision is made for autistic students.
- A tour was carried out of the provision for both the assessor and moderator.
- 14 sessions were observed by the assessment team. These included a range of classroom-based lessons including maths, science and English, as well as P.E, Art, playtime and mealtimes.
- Discussions were held with both teaching staff and therapeutic staff and one parent.
- Personal files were sampled across each key stage. Some key policy documents provided by the school were read. Examples of visual supports and communication strategies were also provided.
- The results of surveys carried out with autistic people and their families were also considered.

Professional Development and Support for Staff

Main approaches or methods employed by the provision in supporting autistic people:

There is a tailored programme of CPD through INSET programmes, including training in:

- Quality of Life & EmBedEd approach
- Therapeutic approaches (OT, S<)
- Careers programme
- Zone of Regulation
- Access to NAS training in for example, autism in girls
- SPELL Approach
- ASK autism
- NAS conference
- Studio 3, positive behaviour support.

The assessor was provided evidence of a detailed and robust induction program.

Training and professional development staff receive in these approaches and in their understanding of autism

In interview with staff, it was described how the autistic perspective is represented in the training material and it gave insight into the needs of students.

There is a clear process for support and training staff which focused on best research-based autism practice. These opportunities were delivered to all staff including ancillary workers.

On-going support available to staff in working with autistic individuals

The school described a robust procedure of ongoing support for staff, these included regular whole school meetings where individual support plans were discussed and any updates in relation to therapy input or risk assessments.

The school provided staff with a tip of the week relating to autism practice from the SPELL framework and also delivered reflective supervision and debrief sessions if required. Staff seemed positive about the support they received from senior leadership.

Section 2: Findings from Assessment

Personal Centred Planning

Brief description of how individual support is planned, implemented and evaluated:

According to the assessment introduction form:

'Our pupils experience a broad academic curriculum, tailored to their specific needs. Their experience is highly personalised, with high staff to pupil ratio allowing for bespoke provision and adaptations. Some of our pupils requiring more support experience a more therapeutic timetable and we make regular adaptations to personal plans dependent upon need.'

At Vanguard they are working along side the National Autism Societies (NAS) initiative to focus on Quality of Life and create person centred planning and support. At Vanguard they have adopted the Emotional Behavioural Development in Education framework (EMBeDEd). The core frame work focuses on:

- Health and physical support needs
- Sensory needs
- Relationships
- Behavioural development
- Emotional development
- Self-determination
- Engagement in activities and learning
- Community participation

The assessor is impressed with the key documentation involved in person centred planning and felt the school has systems to ensure students were involved in creating plans, goal setting and reviewing their progress. Language is accessible to students and is framed in a strengths-based approach, focusing on key autism support strategies.

A credit to the school is providing a stable placement and setting for students, where in the past the students may have struggled in a mainstream setting or their placements have broken down. The school considers the documentation available to staff to avoid students being labelled with past situations or behaviour. Vanguard have created documents which incorporate information from EHCP's, past placement, information obtained from family member and most importantly the individual themselves.

Vanguard plan to further develop the annual review process to support student be more involved and for information to be meaningful and accessible to them.

Differences in Social Communication

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

The school has a clear communication policy outlining the support strategies, mission statement and provision available to staff and students. There are subject specific autism strategies in how to support students in learning to meet their autism needs.

The school benefits from a speech and language therapist, who completes formalised screening and general observations of students in order to tailor support, contribute to documentation and provide bespoke training to staff relevant to students needs.

The therapists work with students on a 1:1 basis, in class and also provides training to the whole staff team, in strategies such as the 5 point emotional scale, Blanks levels and social stories. Vanguard also provide additional communication support through clubs at lunch time such, as Lego and special interest club.

The support plans identify each autistic students' skills and what they might find challenging with social communication and interactions. Documents about the student are created with the student, enabling them to clearly express their preferences in communication.

The support plans are focused on goals, quality of life and how to enable a student to succeed. There is no specific communication section within the support plans however communication needs and specific aids are encompassed into the documents.

Support plans and evidence provided to the assessor, demonstrated each autistic student was set personalised and realistic goals related to their communication and social engagement. There is an entire section in the *Supporting me to Succeed* document, focusing on how to maintain positive relationships.

The school used a '*Check in and Check Out*' system to support students with specific goals which in some instances related to social interaction and communication. Students were given the opportunity to receive positive support strategies at the beginning of a session and were able to reflect both personally and with staff on the outcomes from their specific goal at the end of a session.

In interview with staff, they describe the balance of respecting students' autonomy and their personal struggles with accepting their autism identity. Staff were creative in ensuring students were presented with information in an accessible format and provided additional communication support, whilst being discrete and ensuring students did not feel different or standing out from their peers.

In interviews, staff describe ways they have supported autistic students in their communication and social engagement. One example was the effective use of '*circle of supports*' to enable students to recognise the different relationships available and how these maybe transient or constant in their life.

In another interview, staff describe positive outcomes achieved by autistic students related to their communication and social engagement by negotiating friendships and

peer relationships. For example, a student was supported to access lessons with other students by creating a bespoke programme to increase tolerance and acceptance which lead to an increase in time in lessons and a reduction in anxiety.

Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

Staff made themselves understood, for example by providing students with a variety of individualised checklists to consolidate information being provided verbally. Staff were consistent in writing information down on white/smart boards and using learning resources. In all lessons staff used clear and concise language that was supported with motivating, colourful and interesting visuals or videos.

The autistic students seemed to make themselves understood by talking to staff, the staff seemed in-tune with the students' needs, for example offering emotion regulation support at appropriate times. Where appropriate and required, students had personalised communication aides which capitalised on special interest and were socially acceptable to the individual.

In observations, students tended to sit at individual tables in lessons. There were high staff ratios however Learning Mentors (Teaching Assistants) seemed to tailor the level of direct support given depending on the student's needs. The school could consider building in more paired and group working within lessons.

During lunch and break times, students seemed to enjoy communicating and socialising in a group with their peers. Whereas some students preferred to socialise with staff and receive direct input for example playing table top card games. Staff described opportunities for example in Lego therapy where students were encouraged to communicate with peers.

There were examples of students working independently, teachers utilising Learning Mentors to facilitate group discussions and for example P.E was a prime example of students working together as a team.

In most lessons the language needed to complete tasks was challenging for the students but totally appropriate for the autistic students attainment levels.

In one observation, the assessor reviewed the student's diary, these seemed like a useful resource which could be further developed to support students in a variety of ways. For example, using the white board page for all students to offer their answers in class. Other uses could include having more information and resources relating to Zones of Regulation, so students could report in the moment, using a single page in their diary whether they were entering a zone which they may need support with.

Problem Solving and Self-reliance

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

Using documentation from the EmBeDEd framework, support plans identify each autistic students' skills and challenges in independent functioning. They are at the heart of creating these documents and were reviewed collaboratively with the keyworks to ensure progress and development. These documents and the keyworker support were fundamental in supporting students to make choices and decisions in life and their school journey.

In the '*Supporting Me to Succeed*' document, there were clear plans and goals to support a student with independent functioning. Students were supported to manage change in a variety of different ways, for example in the mornings during tutor time students were provided information on changes in the day, visitors who maybe in the school, if teachers were absent and any up and coming events.

The assessor has suggested an information board which can be referred back to throughout the day maybe useful for students. A Board creating a space for specific information may result in less posters being displayed in random places across the school. Information boards could be class and whole school specific.

There were many examples of aides and processes to support a student with transitions, these included social stories, personalised timetables, visual schedules and situation specific plans.

The school described a robust transition process into the school, involving all the key individuals but most importantly the student at the front and centre of the process.

There has also been careful consideration of destination planning for the students which starts in year 7. There are designated staff to support with careers development and there appeared to be ample opportunities for students to theoretically and practically explore a variety of career pathways. For example, there are poster of staff journeys into their career and also information on what careers can be accessed from studying specific subjects. As the school has only been operating for three years, the assessor feels the school will need time to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the careers and transition programme as students move through the school and onto their next steps after Vanguard.

In interview with staff, one student journey to becoming a vet was explored and a plan was created on the steps required to achieve this, such as the grades needs to be accepted into further education in this subject.

Through the Enrichment programme, Personal Development Life Skills (PDLS) curriculum and the careers planning, students are provided the opportunity to set goals relating to their independent functioning using the '*supporting me to Succeed*' documentation. This appears to be executed in a truly person-centred manor, with students being able to make choices, increase resilience and autonomy.

In interview, staff describe how the enrichment programme had supported students to take positive risks, make decisions and have the opportunity to experience new activities and expand their interests. Due to Covid restrictions, the school has adapted to ensure students are still provided these opportunities with professionals delivering courses such as football, basketball, Judo and music production. The school plans to resume enrichment activities off site which will further provide opportunities for independent function skills, such as travel training.

Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

Through the use of timetables, visual schedules, learning objectives and checklist, students were able to work out what they must do now and what they are expected to do next. In some instances, students could be supported to further develop their skills in using checklists to increase independent working and rely less on staff verbal direction.

Although class sizes were small and staffing ratios were high, there appeared to be an appropriate level of staff support. Where Learning Mentors were not required for direct support, students were given the space to work independently. Lessons seemed well structured for students to be taught new skills and then given the opportunity to explore and practice these skills. This was particularly noted in the art and maths lessons.

Students appeared to have the opportunity to express their ideas, opinions and seemed confident in exploring their ideas in class. In some instances, students had a '*Situation Specific Plan*' or a '*Check in and Check Out*' evaluation sheet to support this process. In art for example, students were able to make choices and decisions on how to explore different techniques of painting.

The whole curriculum seemed designed so that students could develop life skills and learn to work collaboratively and cooperatively. Students were encouraged to be independent throughout transitions in class and throughout the school. There were a wide range of abilities and needs in the classes, staff seemed to be aware of individual needs, working strategies and juggled differentiating learning to meet a range of academic abilities.

Sensory Experiences

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

The school has an Occupational Therapist (O.T) who completes formal and informal assessment of students in regards to their sensory needs. The O.T will contribute to documentation, create individualised strategies and is also involved in reviewing students progress. All students had a sensory profile and information was also provided on the '*Supporting Me to Succeed*' document. There is formal training and informal support for staff on sensory regulation.

The support plans identified sensory experiences which the autistic student finds relaxing or enjoyable as well as those that cause challenge or discomfort. There were clear strategies to support a student with their emotional regulation, for example using the quiet learning room at the back of a classroom.

All documentation showed a person-centred understanding of autism and how best staff could support and the individual could manage their sensory and emotional regulation. Where required students would have a detailed individualised programme to support them with sensory regulation.

As part of the EmBeDEd framework, students have the opportunity to describe their sensory likes and dislikes and create strategies and goals to support their sensory needs. These are reviewed with the student to track progress and evaluate if specific strategies are effective.

In interviews, staff describe the ways they have supported autistic students, in their sensory regulation. For example, some students play a MIND card game or complete crosswords after to lunch to support regulation and bring them to a state ready for learning.

In interviews, staff describe how the school uses Zones of Regulations to support students identify and have strategies in regulating their senses. One positive outcome was adapting the visuals for this by using emojis, as these were more relatable to the cohort.

In interview, staff described the school will be developing a Sensory Integration room. The plans for this room seemed like a positive addition to the sensory support being provided to students, with age appropriate equipment such as gym apparatus, punch bags and a therapy swing.

Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

The environment across the school was low arousal, staff were considerate and checked in on students' sensory needs. For example, by adjusting lighting, playing relaxing music and visualisations in the break of an art session, staff also supported students to leave the classroom but also engage back into learning.

The assessor felt there is scope to increase engaging and meaningful displays across the school, further develop the art gallery concept and make subject specific rooms such as the music and drama room more situational and contextual. This will help students cope with different environments within college or the world of work. It is also suggested the school considers improving signage around the corridors to make it easier to find different classes and specialist rooms.

Staff are creative in meeting all the differing sensory and emotional needs of a group. For example, in maths, all students partook in a movement break, rather than just one student, to avoid anyone feeling self-conscious or singled out for needing a movement break.

Although the school involved the students in selecting some play equipment such as the table tennis table, it was felt more could be offered to meet students vestibular and proprioception needs. With further staff training in playground games for older students and more activities set up to meet a range of sensory interests, students will have increased opportunities to regulate the sensory input when not in lessons.

Through the Enrichment program, some lunch time clubs and personal sensory equipment, students were able to access sensory activities which they found enjoyable, relaxing or regulating.

Autistic students were supported to regulate sensory experiences which interfered with what they are trying to do or caused them discomfort. There were examples in all observations, such as students wearing ear defenders, having fidget toys, using the quiet learning rooms at the back of classrooms or by leaving the room for a regulation break.

There were a variety of different approaches and personalised communication strategies to support students express when they needed some form of sensory adjustment.

Emotional Well-being

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

According to the assessment introduction form:

Pupils benefit from small class sizes (4-7 in a class), subject specialist secondary level teaching, personalised support for learning from learning mentors (teaching assistants) and a range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities. These include: cookery club with social skills; ice skating for independence & risk-taking skills; special interest clubs including computing, table-top games, creative art activities and subject-specific educational trips including trips to the theatre in central London.'

Through the school's Quality of Life approach and the Emotional Behavioural Development in Education framework, support plans identified factors which impacted on an autistic student's well-being and contentment. This was achieved by every student having a keyworker and students working collaboratively to devise support plans and goals.

Support plans describe how best to support autistic students in maintaining their well-being and using strategies to manage anxiety, stress or upset. These included consideration to environmental triggers, sensory needs and social emotional and communication needs.

The support planning process is designed on a strengths-based model, with clear guidance from students on how to support them with their emotional well-being. The plans use language students can relate too and understand. The school has created support plans and documents which are meaningful and accessible to the student.

The school recognises students may have experienced trauma from previous settings and work through these emotions with them, to repair trust and working relationships at the school. Students are involved in setting realistic goals, with clear strategies, resources and recording methods to support a student to achieve.

Positive outcomes are discussed and measured with the student through reflection with keyworkers, through contributing to support plans and during the annual review process. Also, students reflect on positive outcomes through the 'Situation Specific Plans' and the 'Check-in and Check-out' process.

The school provided the assessor with a variety of different evidence and support practice to facilitate positive emotional well-being, mental health and positive peer relationships. Such as Zones of Regulation, anti-bullying procedures and developing and maintaining relationships.

In interviews, staff describe ways they have supported autistic people, in their emotional well-being. For example, working collaboratively in behaviour reviews to establish why behaviours have occurred and discovering support strategies to avoid behaviours escalating in the future.

In an interview with an English teacher, they described how they built studying different texts written by autistic people into the curriculum to explore writing and emotions from an autistic individual and provide a sense of belonging and community.

Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

Throughout the observations, the autistic students presented as feeling safe and calm. In instances where students needed additional space or time to regulate, staff were supportive, respectful, yet still ensured they felt part of the group and not ignored.

The strategies used by staff seemed proactive and preventative and were in place to avoid anxiety, confusion or distress from occurring or escalating. For example, some students had tailored made timetables or used quiet spaces at the back of classrooms to learn.

Restrictive practices were not observed during the assessment, although staff have had training. The paper work seemed informative and focused on preventative, personalise strategies which was reflected in staff working practices.

In some observations staff referred to the Zones of Regulation with students, in other instances staff supported students with their individualised strategies. In many of the form rooms, students were encouraged to reflect on which Zone they were in at the beginning and end of the day. The Zones of Regulation strategies and emotional states could feature in the student's diaries as a tangible resource.

Autistic students were treated with dignity, status and respect and were provided with meaningful positive feedback to boost their confidence and self- esteem during lessons. Where students needed further support in this area, it was provided through the; '*Check-in Check Out*' system. Students appear to respond well to the points reward system and the school values underpinned the expectations of students.

Students appeared engaged in meaningful activities, they were also provided with opportunities through enrichment sessions and clubs which seemed to be fun or interesting to them. The school promoted and educated students on taking positive risks and challenging themselves with new skills and activities.

Consultation with Autistic People

The school has an ethos of putting the student at the centre of planning documentation and are key to devising support packages to meet their needs.

Vanguard are currently developing the annual review process to ensure it is more accessible and inclusive the autistic students.

The school completes student surveys both internally and from the wider National Autistic Society organisation. There is a student council, with a representative from each class. The achievements of the council are celebrated in assemblies. The assessor has suggested the school could celebrate this in a more concrete fashion with the use of perhaps a 'You said, We Did' board.

The school explore and celebrates what it means to be autistic during Autism Awareness Week, in PDLS (Personal Development Life Skills) lessons, tutor time and in school assemblies.

The over 16-year-old students, in the post 16 provision completed the survey provided by the assessor. A full account of the results can be found in the appendix. One person was supported with the survey and the remaining two completed it independently. Overall students were happy with the provision provided to the and felt they were understood by staff.

Consultation with families of Autistic People

At Vanguard there seemed to be a respect for the families and student, being experts of their child and themselves. The school values their knowledge and experience by ensure families are involved in the support planning process. The school described a variety of different ways families are kept informed and are supported in understanding autism and the support practices used at home.

The school ensures that communication with families occurs when there are both positive experiences to share and also informs them when a student is requiring specific input or support.

The assessor spoke to one parent who expressed their contentment with the communication and support their child received at Vanguard. There was a total of 10 family members who responded to the survey, the full results can be found in the appendix of this report.

All family members felt the support their child received was always or mostly good. The same was reported for how they felt staff understood their child. One family member felt the way they were kept informed and asked their views about how their

relative was supported, was ok but could do better and the remaining 9 people felt it was always or mostly good.

Section 3: Summary of assessment

What the provision does particularly well

What stood out as particular strengths:

- The EmBeDEd framework was a particular highlight of Vanguard school. The approach shaped documentation, support practices and put the student at the heart of their emotional, behavioural, educational goals and achievements.
- The school had achieved a well-balanced blend of specific and targeted autism support, whilst maintaining a mainstream feel to the school.
- There was a comprehensive suite of autism specific strategies, onsite professional guidance and a transdisciplinary approach to support. For example, the keyworker and Learning Mentors.
- The quality of teaching was excellent. Work and approaches were differentiated and personalised. Students were able to work and achieve at their own pace and level.
- Opportunities for problem solving and developing independence were seen across the school. Students were not fazed by challenges and were comfortable with asking questions and seeking help if necessary.
- Staff were creative in supporting student's autism specific needs whilst ensuring no student felt different or singled out from their peers.

What else the provision does well:

- The use of the interactive whiteboard to support learning and communication was seen in all class-based lessons. The information displayed was clear, informative, comprehensive, attractive and relevant.
- The building in of breaks, as part of planning, enabled students to tackle lessons in manageable chunks and regulate their emotional and sensory needs.
- There were high staff ratios, adults were effective in not *over* supporting students and skilled at facilitating independence. Due to the low student ratio in classrooms, staff added a positive dynamic to the classroom's social engagement.
- The environment was calm and low arousal.
- Communication supports, were personalised and structured in a clear and unambiguous way, to support students understand what is expected of them.

What the provision could develop further

Priorities for the provision:

- A wider range of play equipment on the playground for students who want to be outside at breaks but who may not enjoy joining in a game of tag or football with others. Outside equipment to support vestibular, proprioceptive and socialisation needs, would be beneficial. Some form of horticulture could provide a good sensory activity if there is room on site. Training for staff in playground games for older students.
- There is scope to increase engaging and meaningful displays across the school, further develop the art gallery concept and make subject specific rooms such as the music and drama room more situational and contextual.
- Considers improving signage around the corridors to make it easier to find different classes and specialist rooms.

Other areas to consider:

- Information board which can be referred back to throughout the day maybe useful for students. A Board for specific information may result in less posters being displayed in random places across the school. Information boards could be class and whole school specific.
- The assessor has suggested the school could celebrate student council achievements in a more concrete fashion with the use of perhaps a 'You said, We Did' board.
- The school will need time to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the careers programme as students move through the school and onto their next steps after Vanguard. Develop the links with employers and colleges to move the current careers programme from theory to practice.
- Resume enrichment activities off site which will further provide opportunities for independent function skills, such as travel training.
- To build the sensory integration room and implement a usage plan for the space.
- Build on already good practice, by breaking down tasks for students so they can follow through an activity without the need for verbal support from adults and develop more independence.
- Home school dairies could be further utilised in lesson by using the resources already in them, such as white boards to answer questions in lesson. The school could consider to increase the resources int hem to include information on Zones of Regulation and students write down person regulation strategies.

- Consider planning and building in more opportunities for pair and group working.
- Vanguard school to continue to develop the annual review process to ensure it is accessible and inclusive to the autistic students.

APPENDIX 1: SURVEYS

Autistic Student

1. The support I am given is good?

● Yes 👍	3
● No 👎	0
● Sometimes	0



2. Staff understand me and my needs

● Yes 👍	2
● No 👎	0
● Sometimes	1



3. The staff listen to me on how I want to be helped

● Yes 👍	3
● No 👎	0
● Sometimes	0



4. Who completed the questions above?

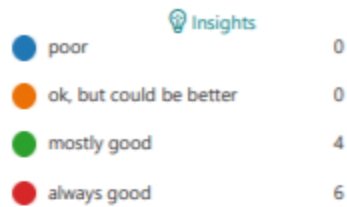
● The autistic person by themsel...	2
● The autistic person with supp...	1
● A staff member who represent...	0
● A family member or friend wh...	0



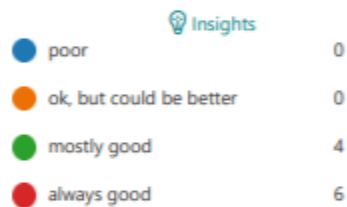
APPENDIX 1: SURVEYS

Family Member

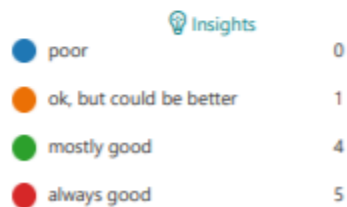
1. The support my relative is given is...



2. The understanding that staff have for my relatives autistic needs is...



3. The way I am kept informed and asked my views about how my relative is supported is...



4. The advice I get from the service on how to help my relative is...

